American Dance

Education Support

Creating Choreography with Visual Props

by Joyce E. Pennington

There are many considerations to take when selecting your props for the coming season. It seems that budget takes priority in most of the decision making. Many options come to mind that might allow your budget a break. You can always add a fresh coat of paint or add a little glitz with glitter to old props that can totally change their look. Many teams work out a trade with other teams to "borrow" or "lend" props for the season. You can also resource the *American Directors Corner* or the *TDEA* page on Facebook as many teams are 'cleaning house' and selling their old props. Your audience may have never seen the prop and it will be totally new to them.

According to the size of your team, your props should display a balanced look. If you have a small team, you may want to try a large prop, or a prop with a "large look" that will fill the center of the field with your performance. On the other hand, if you have a large team, you do not want to overwhelm your audience with too much action to where the routine appears too "busy". You should try to choose colors that will stand out against a green field as well as contrast from the uniform colors so the audience can see the prop.

You should also choose music that compliments the prop. The style of music should not leave the audience puzzled about your selection. Also, make sure that the piece is not too difficult for your band to play. Even if you have a very advanced band, they will only have a limited amount of time to prepare for your performance in addition to their own halftime and contest shows.

Take the time to work with the drum major to ensure that you have the proper tempo. When a piece is played too slow, your team will lose energy as well as concentration. If it is played too fast, it will cause sporadic delays with some that cannot keep up, especially when changing formations. Choose music that will uplift the audience as well as your team.

When you have chosen your prop and music, start with a central idea or focus on the general presentation of the routine. Chart the music to find the high points, sections, chorus and special focal points. Place your visual ideas on paper along with the compatible spots on your music chart. Now you are ready to actually begin your physical choreography. Always use your prop during creative choreography as many times what is visual in your mind may not always physically work out. Make sure that the choreography connects smoothly and that the routine has a good flow. Have several

focal points during the routine that will keep the audience entertained. Build to a final focal point for an ending that will create a visual picture to leave with the audience.

To polish your prop routine, each team member must have the actual prop to work with. Make sure that you have spent ample rehearsal time with your prop so that the correct body and prop placement may be clarified when polishing the routine. Remember that the total presentation of a routine is measured by the sharpness of the performance and that your team members will be more confident if they have spent the appropriate amount of preparation.

When constructing your props, make sure that you have used sturdy materials that will hold up to the practice, transporting, storing and performance of their use. Make sure to store your props properly so that they will be in their best condition when needed for routines. Many teams will rent mini-warehouse storage to store their props during off season. Always make sure to have your managers inventory and check the condition of all props at least three to four weeks ahead of their use so that any additions or reconstruction can be taken care of before they are needed.

Prop routines can be the highlight of your performance season. They are always the most visual and entertaining of all routines. Use your creative imagination when planning for their use and you will always have satisfying results!